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THE FUNCTION OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT PLACEMENT OFFICER.

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ONE PERSON IN EACH ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SHOULD ASSUME THE POSITION OF PLACEMENT OFFICER IN ORDER TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MORAL SUPPORT TO PH.D.'S LOOKING FOR JOBS. AT BERKELEY THE PLACEMENT OFFICER INTERVIEWS ALL PROSPECTIVE JOB SEEKERS IN SEPTEMBER AND PREPARES A COMPLETE FILE ON EACH STUDENT. ON THE BASIS OF THIS INFORMATION AND A LIST OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S JOB PREFERENCES, THE PLACEMENT OFFICER PREPARES A LETTER WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY A BIOGRAPHY OF THE STUDENT'S WORK AT BERKELEY. HE SENDS THESE LETTERS WHEN HE THINKS A PARTICULAR POSITION MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE FOR A STUDENT OR WHEN A UNIVERSITY EVINCES INTEREST. THE STUDENTS ARE ADVISED NOT TO TAKE JOBS UNTIL AFTER THE MLA DECEMBER MEETING. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED AS PART OF "THE CDE BULLETIN," NUMBER 3, OCTOBER 1964. (BN)

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THE FUNCTION OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT PLACEMENT OFFICER, by John H. Raleigh, Vice-Chairman, Dept. of English, University of California at Berkeley

As with all other administrative operations of a department, the placement job will not get done properly unless one person is formally responsible for its effective operation. His primary function is to provide two ingredients that all young Ph.D.'s looking for jobs genuinely need: information and moral support. He should be constantly available to them and also should be at the MLA meeting where he should be easily and readily available for their questions.

In September all prospective job seekers at Berkeley are called into the office of the Placement Officer, who talks to each person long enough and in enough detail to get some sense of what this person is like. He also, of course, attempts to find out what kind of a job the student would like. More discreetly, he attempts to ascertain what job would be best suited for the student. And he obtains a brief description of the student's dissertation from the professor who is directing it.

First the student is told to file an offical dossier with the University Placement Bureau. He is then told to make out a list of colleges or universities in which he would be interested and to make out a letter about himself to send to prospective employers. A week or two later he comes back to the Placement Officer with his proposed list and his proposed letter. He has already been told to keep the letter to one page or under and make it more or less a brief autobiography. The placement officer and the student then discuss the list of colleges or universities.

This discussion requires some tact. The mediocre student who will only consider Harvard or Yale must be set right immediately. Sometimes, however, student ambitions have to be punctured more gently. The Placement Officer here should perhaps place some of his cards on the table but certainly not all of them. It has been the practice at Berkeley for the Placement Officer to know a little more than he is actually telling.

Meanwhile a secretary has assembled a complete file on each student. This file includes all the departmental records: the official record card, the description of the M.A. and qualifying examinations, the reports on seminar work and the reports on teaching assistantships. These are confidential records and since, generally speaking, members of a department do not tell lies, at least in any extravagant fashion, to one another, this information is fairly objective.

On the basis of this information, the Placement Officer prepares a letter which is in reality a departmental imprimatur about each student. Again, in reality this letter is a biography of the student's work at Berkeley. It is wise to keep this letter to about one page and to make it as concrete and objective as possible. One cites, for example, the official record of how the student actually performed as a Teaching Assistant or how he handled himself in the qualifying examination. At least one paragraph is given to a brief but specific description of what the person looks like and what the person is. In composing these letters the Placement Officer should try to be honest. Complete honesty in these matters in all cases is perhaps impossible, but he should not attempt to blow up a middle class student into an upper class student. If the letters are carefully enough composed, any intelligent person can readily see these distinctions.

By middle or late October, the students send out letters of inquiry. The Placement Officer does not send out his letters in a wholesale fashion. He reserves them for two conditions which sometimes coincide and which sometimes do not. He sends his letters first when a university or college evinces a genuine interest in a student, and second, when in the opinion of the Placement Officer, this student and this institution would seem to go well together. It is important not to waste letters on lost causes. I think that in the past at Berkeley some of us have erred in sending out too many departmental letters.

The Placement Officer should also consult with the university administration to see if there are any funds available for travel for graduate students. It is necessary that these job seekers be at the MLA meeting, and the trip, for instance, from SanFrancisco to New York is an expensive one. In the past we have been generally successful in obtaining funds for this purpose from the Universtiy.

Our students are told not to take jobs until after the MLA meeting because they may cut themselves off from good possibilities. Needless to say, if a major university offers a job to a man who wants to go there, he takes it, but job-hunting is seldom this clear-cut. These days, the entire operation is usually finished by two weeks after the MLA meeting. I should hope anyway that until a better national system is devised, employers would hold back on their hard-and-fast offers until after the MLA meeting.

As one final amenity late in the spring, our faculty has a dinner for the departing Ph.D.'s. This dinner is attended by all departing Ph.D.'s, the Chairman of the Department, the Vice-Chairman, the Chairman of the Committee on Graduate Studies, and the directors of dissertations. The dinner is of course preceded by cocktails and has always proved to be a festive occasion. There are no speeches.